

REVIEW OF *WORKING PORTUGUESE FOR BEGINNERS*

Working Portuguese for Beginners

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with M. Lynne Gerber

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In a moment when the Brazilian economy is booming and the demand for learning the Portuguese language is at its peak, especially for professional adults, *Working Portuguese for Beginners* is a welcome addition to the editorial market, filling a lacuna for business Portuguese as spoken in Brazil. This book with CD-ROM is part of the *Working Language* series, designed for English-speaker business professionals interested in acquiring the basic communication skills of a foreign language in order to function in a business or professional setting. The materials for *Working Portuguese* were initially developed for the Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, for students in a course that combined classroom time with remote learning methods, culminating in a two-week trip to Brazil. According to the authors, *Working Portuguese* can be used as materials for a regular university course, in which the materials can be divided into two or three academic semesters; as a combination of face-to-face instruction and remote learning, in the case of busy professionals; or as self-pacing materials for self-taught students. In any of these cases, it is expected that students do much of the learning outside of the classroom (estimated to take two or three hours per week) by studying each lesson's dialogues, new vocabulary, grammar, and cultural sections. To this end, *Working Portuguese* includes a CD with audio for the vocabulary, the dialogues, and the exercises for each lesson. The audio is in MP3 format, making it very convenient for busy students to listen to their materials.

The textbook itself, which has 512 pages and is written in Brazilian Portuguese with English translations, includes a series of chapters. First, it opens with a strong introduction and focus on pronunciation and spelling with important tips such as the pronunciation of stressed vowels. Next, there are six units: "Building Business Relationships," "At Work," "Social Interactions and Trips," "Meetings," "Management Challenges," and "Using Working Portuguese." Each of these units contains four lessons, followed by an appendix with the lessons' dialogues translated into English, as well as an English-to-Portuguese Glossary and a Portuguese-to-English Glossary.

Each lesson opens with a statement of its objectives that inform students about what they should be able to acquire by the end of the lesson regarding each of the components of Communication Skills, Culture and Business Relations, and Grammar. Next, dialogue sections introduce the vocabulary and the grammar

that appear. This section is divided into formal and informal dialogues. The formal dialogues are always based on a professional and business setting, while the informal dialogues that mention everyday life themes are usually based on a student life scenario. The grammar points mentioned in the lesson appear in bold. The audio for the dialogues are recorded by native Brazilians (two men and two women from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Minas Gerais) who read their parts very clearly and in a professional tone. For each dialogue there is both a complete and a paused version, the latter allowing students to repeat portions of the dialogue. The dialogues are well constructed and do an excellent job incorporating the vocabulary and the grammar from the lesson within various Brazilian professional and academic scenarios. The vocabulary is varied but is also repeated during the dialogues. However, it is noticeable that whenever there is a scenario in which a boss (supervisor, sales director, managers) interacts with a subordinate (usually the secretary), the former is represented by a male and the latter by a female. This detail might reinforce gender stereotypes concerning Brazilian culture, even though women are increasingly in supervisory positions in the Brazilian workplace—including in the presidential palace.

The dialogues are followed by the vocabulary section, which offers exhaustive lists of work-related lexicons as well as many commonly used verbs and everyday expressions. All vocabulary words and expressions are translated into English, and their audios are available in the MP3 files so students can also master the pronunciation. The grammar sections offer very comprehensive explanations (written in Portuguese and translated into English) and cover all the topics traditionally taught in many other beginning-level Portuguese for foreigners' textbooks: *Ponto de Encontro* (Klobucka, Jouet-Pastré, Moreira, Sobral, & Hutchinson, 2007) and *Falar, Ler, Escrever... Português* (Lima & Iunes, 2003). In the practice sections students will find some multiple choice, fill-in-the-blanks, and matching exercises. These also include an *experience* exercise that prompts students to produce language by creating a dialogue or writing a description, and a *conversation* assignment, in which topics for discussion with classmates are offered. Although the proposed exercises are good practice activities, they are few in comparison with the extensive vocabulary and grammar topics previously covered in the lessons and are not sufficient enough to consolidate all the information given.

Each lesson ends with the culture section, which comprises small texts written by the authors that offer a window into Brazilian society, geography, language, customs, and work-related issues. Some topics are enlightening, such as the section on salary (Lesson 11), in which the student learns that Brazilians refer to a monthly rather than a yearly salary, as well as other terminology particular to Brazilian work-related culture such as the *décimo-terceiro* (an amount equivalent to the monthly salary that is paid around Christmas time). Other texts, however, reinforce stereotypes about Brazilian national character. For example, in Lesson 5, whose cultural topic is “What is it to be Brazilian?” the authors assert: “the great virtue of the Brazilian is informality; in a way, the Brazilian continues being like a Tupinambá Indian, opening his house and his family to visiting gringos” (p. 102).

The *Working Portuguese Teacher's Edition* comes with a DVD-ROM that includes, in addition to the audio file exercises previously mentioned, a teacher's manual, the answer key for the exercises in the book, quizzes and a midterm exam with answer keys. One drawback, to my mind, is the brevity and focus on basics of the quizzes and midterm. Also included are four special activities, including a dinner at a Brazilian restaurant, an activity fair in which students are prompted to ask and answer questions related to hotel booking and checking-in, a visit to a travel agency, and trip to the theater. Finally, 21 PowerPoint files are included, which may well be the most useful tool on the disk. Each PowerPoint file contains an outline of the lessons that can work as a plan or guideline to be followed in class. The slides start with the correction of the most common mistakes from the previous lesson's homework, followed by a revision of the previous lesson's grammar points and an introduction of the new lesson's vocabulary and grammar topics, with suggestions for activities and exercises. They are saved in Word format so that teachers can modify them (adding or deleting information, adding photos, audio, or videos) according to their personal teaching style or the needs of their individual students. The Teacher's edition also comes with free access

to Quia's website (<http://books.quia.com>), a course management tool also available for students for a small fee. Quia is very user-friendly and easy to navigate. Once an account is created, the site prompts instructors to create a class and gives the option to add class location and meeting days times, assistants and additional classes. This logistical information is followed up with the receipt of printable registration instructions to provide students. Once in a created class, instructors can access all exercises from the book and decide which activities they want to assign. When students are doing the online exercises, they can write, listen to the audio and record their answers. Once they submit their responses, they receive immediate feedback in form of an answer key or a rubric. Quia allows students to resubmit their assignment multiple times, but instructors can determine the number of attempts made, as well as the grading options and decide, for example, how the final score will be calculated.

A few more comments about these materials are worth noting. First, the *preview* link allows users to access the entire content of the book, including the exercises and the audio. Also, the technical support of Quia provides efficient and professional answers to questions. A few drawbacks are worth mentioning, too. Although using Quia and managing the online version was easy, the online content is exactly the same as the content in the book. Additional exercises, as there are few in the book, would have been useful. I also expected different types of audio that would allow students to receive authentic aural input, since the MP3 files available are limited to voice recordings by actors, who speak with unnatural clarity and pacing. Such authenticity would have been a nice feature, since the students are expected to do most of their learning outside of class and have limited time to practice listening and speaking with the instructor and peers. In addition, the *Working Portuguese* online component does not explore resources available on the web, nor does it make use of newer technologies, which misses the opportunity to use videos that could otherwise showcase Brazil and Brazilians and allow students to have the chance to hear Portuguese spoken by natives in natural speech. Personally, I also would have liked to see authentic readings (from newspapers, business-related magazines, or even some short stories) or Brazilian websites related to the working world. The instructor adopting *Working Portuguese* would have to fill in these missing gaps. Other resources for instructors seeking such additional supports might include, for example, authentic readings from Brazil's main online newspapers and from a designated website for the Brazilian work-related magazine called *Você S.A.*, which uses business language accessible for the beginner to low-intermediate levels (<http://vocesa.abril.com.br/>). A database of authentic videos and several Portuguese language and Brazilian culture teaching materials can also be found at the BrazilPod (<http://www.coerll.utexas.edu/brazilpod/index.php>), which was created as an open-source site by the professors of Portuguese at the University of Texas at Austin.

Given its emphasis on professional context, its focus on work-related vocabulary, and its premise that most of the work should be done outside of the classroom, I would recommend *Working Portuguese* for corporate language training courses and for self-taught professionals seeking basic interactional skills if working with Brazilians. These learners can obtain solid explanations of grammar, but will need additional resources to increase the amount of authentic input available as they build their communicative skills.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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